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# ENG 5091-001: The Call of Stories: Introduction to Narrative Theory

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**English 5091, The Call of Stories: Introduction to Narrative Theory****Coleman Hall 3159 W 7:00 to 9:30****Dr. Daiva Markelis/dmmarkelis@eiu.edu****Office: Coleman Hall 3375****Office Hours: M 3:00 to 4:00, T/R 11:00 to 12:30, W 5:30 to 7:00****and by appointment****Course Description**

“We tell ourselves stories in order to live,” writes Joan Didion in *The White Album*. This simple proclamation eloquently summarizes what might be seen as the basic tenet of narrative theory: storytelling is a fundamental human strategy we use to construct meaning, to engage with questions of identity, and to make sense of time, progression, and change. In addition to its prominent position in linguistics and literary studies, narrative theory has been utilized in anthropology, psychology/counseling, music, computers, and child development. In the first half of this course we will focus on the history of narratology, the umbrella term for both the theory and study of narrative. The second half of the course will be devoted to the application of narrative theory. Teachers use narrative not only to get students to write—the personal narrative, for better or worse, remains the most popular introductory assignment in freshman composition—but also to examine the stylistic choices authors make.

**Required Textbooks***The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative* by H. Porter Abbott*S/Z: An Essay* by Roland Barthes <http://www.scribd.com/doc/8295257/>*Sacred Narrative/Readings* by Alan Dundes*The Storytelling Animal* by Jonathan GottschallVladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folk Tale* (available free online)Ernst Cassirer, *Language and Myth*, (available free online)

Course Packet and/or handouts

**Requirements**

See attached sheet.

**Attendance**

Attendance is mandatory. Excused medical or legal absences must be accompanied by appropriate documentation. If you become suddenly ill or the victim of emergency circumstances, please phone or email me as soon as possible and stay in touch. More than one absence may mean this is not the semester for you to be taking a graduate seminar.

**Plagiarism**

Any paper with your name on it signifies that you are the author--that the wording and major ideas are yours, with exceptions indicated by either quotation marks and/or citations. Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use (appropriation and/or imitation) of others' materials (words and ideas). Evidence of plagiarism will result in one or more of the following: a failing grade for the assignment, an F in the course, and a report filed with the Judicial Affairs Office.

August	21	Course Introduction
	28	Gottschall, Chapters 2,3,4, and 5
September	4	Abbott, Chapters 1 through 8
	11	Abott, Chapters 9 to the end
	18	Read “The Problem of Defining Myth,” (Honko, p. 41) “Slippery Words” (Rogerson, 62) “The Fall of Man” (Frazer 72) Also: Gottschall, Chapter 6
	25	Ernst Cassirer, <i>Language and Myth</i> <a href="http://www.scribd.com/doc/8295257/">http://www.scribd.com/doc/8295257/</a>
	30	Vladimir Propp, <i>Morphology of the Folk Tale</i> <a href="http://homes.di.unimi.it/~alberti/Mm10/doc/propp.pdf">http://homes.di.unimi.it/~alberti/Mm10/doc/propp.pdf</a>
October	2	Read all of Barthes, begin with short story at the end of the book
	9	Literary applications of narrative theory (handouts or course packet)
	23	Life narratives and autobiography
	30	Using the personal narrative in composition classes
November	6	Creative writing and narrative
	13	Oral narratives
	20	Presentations
	27	Thanksgiving Break
December	4	Presentations

## CLASS REQUIREMENTS for 5091

### FINAL RESEARCH PAPER/PRESENTATION 50%

#### Paper

First things first: the paper is due at the end of the semester, probably the Wednesday of finals week—the day you would be taking the final if, indeed, I was giving a final. Which I'm not. You can turn your paper in any time, though if you hand it to me next week I will be highly suspicious. The research paper can be on any aspect of narrative.

Secondly: yes, the paper will incorporate outside sources. The more, the merrier. Though it's also true that too many cooks spoil the soup. What you want is a paper grounded in theory, a paper that shows off your knowledge of important concepts and at the same time reveals something new about your chosen topic/area. The number and types of sources will depend on the kind of research you're doing. A paper about reliably unreliable narrators in novels such as *Fight Club*, *Crime and Punishment*, and *Lolita* will utilize more outside sources than an ethnography where you record and listen to people telling funny stories in a bar. (Because the people **are** sources.) For an essay about the significance of call narratives in the Old Testament you'll need different (and probably more) sources than for an analysis of literacy narratives written in your freshman composition class.

Thirdly: It's not how long you make it; it's how you make it long. That said, you probably can't say something new and profound in fewer than fifteen pages.

#### Presentation

Should be about fifteen minutes long. The purpose of the presentation is not to reveal all of your secrets, but to present enough to get feedback and ideas you can then apply to your paper.

### YOU PICK TWO 40%

Choose any **two** of the following. These can be done/turned in any time. (Each is 20%.)

**Take-home mid-term:** This midterm would deal with material we've studied up until and including the seventh week. There will be three or four fairly difficult questions asking you to compare theorists on any number of issues dealing with narrative. Of course, you may look at your texts for material, but I don't want a lot of quotes. **Seven or eight typed, double-spaced pages.** I would give out the questions on Week Seven and expect them back Week Eight.

**Review of book on narrative:** This would include a **three to four page traditional review** (summary, analysis, opinion) in addition to a **ten-minute presentation to the class.** Books on any aspect of narrative are welcome, though I'd like you to talk to me briefly about your choice. I have quite a few books available—you're free to look them over. This option may be a good choice if you already have a specific area of interest, such as feminist narratives, Biblical narratives, oral narratives, queer narratives, etc. This is also a good choice if you've been dying to read a text by a specific theorist; Wayne Booth, Hayden White, Jerome Brunner, Mikhail Bakhtin, Claude Levi-Strauss are just a few examples.

**Teaching segment:** You would **teach a forty-five minute segment** on an aspect of narrative or a particular theorist. You can use a journal article—I'd need to get it at least a week before your session so that I can make copies—or explain an approach using Power Point, film clips, and handouts. (Or a combination of article and PP, clip, etc.) You can explore the areas of interest or ideas of one of the theorists listed under Review of book above. Discussion with class members should be a part of your presentation. And a handout wouldn't be a bad idea.

**Creative narrative assignment:** Just what it sounds like. Here are some options:

- 1) Look at a photograph or series of photographs of your family or friends. Write the narrative that the stories seem to tell.
- 2) Write a personal narrative or a brief history about a part of your body.
- 3) Compose an event in your life as a comics page. Add a short written narrative (2-3 paragraphs) explaining the artistic choices you made regarding caricature, detail, frames, dialogue bubbles.
- 4) Write the story of your life in a narrative poem.

**Length is variable here—though a minimum of five pages seems reasonable** for essays, don't you think?

**Annotated bibliography:** The Cornell University Library site defines an annotated bibliography as “a list of citations to books, articles, and documents. Each citation is followed by a brief (usually about 150 words) descriptive and evaluative paragraph, the annotation. The purpose of the annotation is to inform the reader of the relevance, accuracy, and quality of the sources cited.” <http://olinuris.library.cornell.edu/ref/research/skill28.htm>. The examples I've used above concerning areas of interest apply here as well. Your bib should reflect the range of approaches and ideas related to your area, and should be at least **eight pages** long.

## **PARTICIPATION 10%**

Read the work. I have a finely tuned bull-shit detector, so overly vague and general will not fly. I want “When Barthes writes on page 52...I think he means....” and not “Barthes is hard to understand.” On the other hand, no one likes a smarty-pants. Be respectful, thoughtful, and succinct. Help each other out. Participation is not a sport.